

【論文】

## Writing Pictures

Using drawing to help university students learn English as a second language.

Tim Thornton, 2019

### Abstract

Part one of this paper reviews various methods of using drawing in ESL classes at an Art University and assesses the successful results and shortfalls of using drawing to learn a second language. The second part of the paper looks at one of the methods, called ‘Writing Pictures’ and its use in ESL classes with students majoring in subjects not usually associated with the visual arts. The drawing exercises have been carried out at universities in Japan. The participants were male and female students and the illustrations, unless otherwise stated, were made by the students.

Keywords: Classroom drawing activities, visual memory, drawing to learn a second language

### Introduction

*Why draw in English class?*

This report is about using drawing in English classes at Universities in Japan. Part 1 reviews various methods of using drawing in an ESL classroom situation developed with Art and Design students. Part 2 focuses on the results of using drawing exercises with students studying English who are not usually engaged in drawing or illustration in their daily studies.

I’ve been using drawing in class as a component of classes whose syllabi consist mostly of textbook study and/or project work and presentations. The drawing exercises developed through a desire to offer students a rich and varied assortment of learning situations. In their various forms, which will be reviewed after this introduction, they take from 20-30 minutes up to 90 minutes, a full class, and are used at moments in-between longer presentation-based projects, to mark the end of a section in a textbook, or the start or finish of a semester. The classes I teach (and therefore the drawing exercises) are conducted entirely in English and are aimed at students of different levels, from beginner to advanced, there are usually between 15 to 40 students in a class.

Before teaching English in Japan, I worked at an architectural practice in London, during my time there, we routinely used drawing and painting as a mode of communication which we saw as a 'conversation' and a vital part of the evolution and development of projects. The drawings and paintings were always the result of a conversation, this could be a conversation between a small group within the studio, or with clients, engineers and members of the public in workshop situations. Within the field of architecture, the function of using drawing with these various groups was not only to discuss opinions, but also to allow the interested parties to examine their ideas from a different perspective. It was often the case that this process would expose some preconceptions and allow the participants a different outlook.

For example, when a group of residents was asked how their town centre could be improved they would cite perfectly valid issues such as better parking facilities, more trees and cleaner streets, but once with a paintbrush in their hands, faced with a blank canvas, they would become the architects and their ideas were expressed in a different form; that of space, colour, abstraction, memories and experiences, the place you went on holiday last year, the view of your mother's garden from a window.

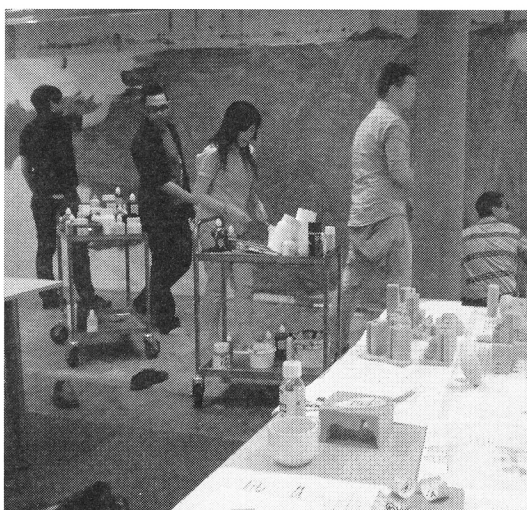


Fig.1 Group drawing at the Alsop studio, 2009

It seemed possible that this process should somehow have the potential to be used with students studying English. Drawing could be used to help to expand the students' outlook towards studying English, but could it also be useful to enable learning English in more practical ways? Some research into visual memory and drawing suggests that it could.

It is generally accepted that we humans typically have a strong visual memory and that this how we understand and process much of the world around us. There have been numerous studies which have confirmed the dominance of visual memory over our other senses. For example, in a study of auditory and visual memory (Cohen, M.A., Evans, K.K., Horowitz, T.S. et al. 2011) found that some fundamental

difference exists between visual and auditory stimuli, or visual and auditory processing, when it comes to recognition memory capacities, with the advantage persistently going to vision.”

Moreover, the act of making a drawing can further enhance our memory. In experiments comparing drawing and writing, Jeffrey D. Wammes, Melissa E. Meade & Myra A. Fernandes found that “drawn words were better recalled than written.” (2015) The groups experiments “indicate that drawing enhances memory relative to writing, across settings, instructions, and alternate encoding strategies...” and “propose that drawing improves memory by encouraging a seamless integration of semantic, visual, and motor aspects of a memory trace.”

Looking at a text accompanied by a picture is more memorable than just reading the text alone, according to a study conducted by Mr. Ishibashi of Waseda University (2012). However when drawing an illustration by yourself, the memory retention after reading the text, is overwhelmingly high.

## Part 1

### **A review of various methods of using drawing in English language classes at an Art University.**

*The pros and cons of drawing activities in class.*

The reasons as to why it is constructive to use drawing in class with Art University students are listed as follows:

- Most learners of a second language will state that a good way to learn is by engaging in something that you enjoy. The Art students are studying many fields ranging from textiles and ceramics to graphic design, media arts and painting. So although they have differing specialist interests, they all share the common skill of being adept at drawing.
- Having graduated from art school myself this is also a shared interest between myself and the students.
- Variety in the classroom. There are various ways of acquiring a second language and adding some variety to classes is a way of suiting the learning preferences of students. While some students prefer to use a textbook, others are happier working on their own projects. Maureen J. Lage, Glenn J. Platt & Michael Treglia (2000) advocate “a portfolio of teaching styles so as to appeal to a variety of student learning types”.
- Forms of communication. So that students can use language as part of a range of communication and broaden their concept of language as part of a suite of communication beyond the four

language learning skills to include sound, vision and movement.

- The style of university education during the first year appears, to one who passed through the university system in the UK, packed with a timetable of subject-specific and general classes. This style offers a busy and dynamic life for the students, however, teachers and students alike are subject to a certain level of institutionalisation and I wanted find ways to challenge preconceptions about ESL classes and offer the students responsibility and the possibility to use their own initiative in class.
- Most of the students have specific interests which are the focus of their studies and learning English language is a requirement of the course rather than a choice. The largest classes, in my experience, are ‘basic-level’ classes, and the conclusion I’ve drawn from this is that previous English classes, have failed these students. At high school, for example, students are motivated to learn English to pass their university entrance exams which have a bias towards the learning of grammar and reading (Masakazu Iino, 2002). Using drawing is a way to allow students to focus more on using English to communicate.

In this section I will outline four methods of using drawing in class that I have used and their benefits or otherwise. All of the planning and execution of the following activities is conducted in English.

## 1.Collaborative Painting

It takes a full 90 minute class to set up and complete a painting. The students bring their own ink/paint and brushes and work together to make a painting large enough so that they can work at the same time, larger classes can be split into two or three groups. I usually provide large sheets of paper, plastic covers for the tables, some painting materials, cloths and containers.

The theme of the painting can be decided by the students, it’s usually a general theme such as animals, food or portraits and any or all of the suggestions can be combined in one painting. It was interesting for me, and I learnt early on, that for Japanese students



Fig.2 Collaborative painting, 2017



a brush is also a writing tool. It's a really positive experience to use English to achieve a concrete goal, in this case the production of a large painting. It shares many similarities, in terms of the language skills needed, to a real-life situation, particularly, though not exclusively, for students who are pursuing a future in design and arts industries.

One of the goals of making a group painting was also to change the atmosphere of the classroom and encourage more conversation between the students. Making a collaborative painting involves some logistics and it is this, in fact, that forms a large part of the English language content for the class. The students follow directions, make suggestions and discuss the content and outcome of the painting.

While it's not necessary to have any control of the painting (a glorious and interesting mess is the usual outcome! See Fig.2) a certain amount of direction is necessary. The students need encouragement to draw big and not be afraid to draw on top of other drawings. The students should move around the table so that they don't stay in one place and also swap paints and brushes with each other.

In terms of language development, collaborative painting succeeds to varying degrees depending on the ability of the students. It has been most successful with groups of less than 10 intermediate-level (or above) students. Bigger groups with less ability to speak in English tend to quickly revert to speaking Japanese although they do benefit from the positive aspects of the exercise outlined above such as using English to produce a painting, socialising, following directions and making suggestions.

## 2.Whiteboard drawing

A simpler version of the collaborative painting project is to draw on the board in class. This can be completed in half an hour but its not easy to get the whole class drawing together.

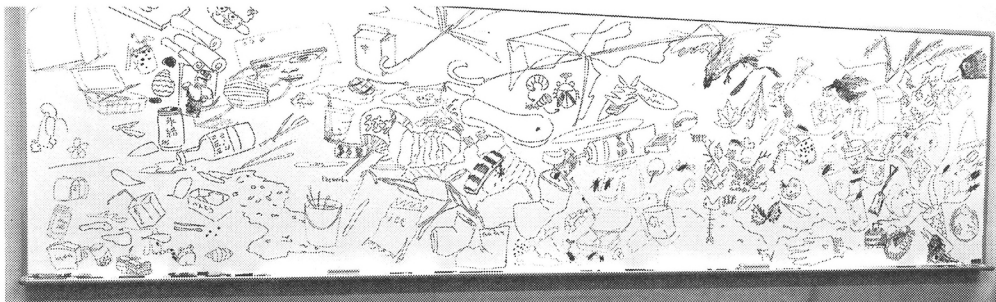


Fig.3 'Seasonal Trash' themed drawing made on the whiteboard, 2019.

### 3.Using a projector in class

Most classrooms can be blacked out and with a portable projector, students can create a kind of immersive artwork. The advantage of this over making paintings is that there is less mess than making a painting. The students can also become part of the artwork themselves, this is great for performing artists. However, in the darkened room, the coloured light and movement is almost hypnotic and the class invariably falls into a transfixed silence.

In summary, the positive aspects of these three techniques of integrating drawing into English classes are that the students can use English to achieve a real goal, this is something which brings using language and action closer to a situation that those involved in art and design fields may encounter on a regular basis in their future careers - collaborating with others, discussing outcomes and negotiating the logistics of a task. The exercises involve the students communicating with each other, they offer a transformation from the typical classroom situation. They are good fun for most of the students and help to improve group dynamics.

The drawbacks with the above activities are that they are time consuming, sometimes require special materials and, of primary concern, although there are benefits in terms of learning English the balance of engaging in an interesting activity to English output and development seem a little skewed.

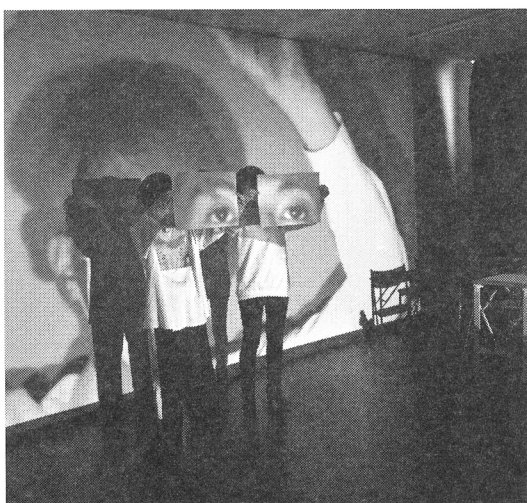


Fig.4 Using a projector, 2018

### 4.Writing Pictures

The idea of the exercise that I am calling 'Writing Pictures' developed as a way to find an activity which was not too time consuming, didn't require special materials and where the students could still work in the visual realm, with more focus on English language. I will explain the process of 'Writing Pictures' in more detail as it is the exercise which I found to be the most practical in class and the most transferrable to other universities. Writing Pictures started as an aural exercise but it soon became

apparent that it could also be used as a reading, oral or writing exercise. It works in these different ways as follows:

- Listening. The teacher reads a short text repeatedly while the students draw. I usually say I'll read the text three times, but in reality it takes a few more repetitions, its best to walk around the class while you read to check the progress of the drawings. After 15 minutes or so, papers can be swapped amongst the students and the teacher can take them through the details of the text by showing a drawing. This can either be pre-prepared, or drawn on a board or over head projector.
- Reading. The students are given a text to read and from which to make a drawing (this can also be used in paper tests).
- Writing. The students write and, optionally, illustrate their own text which other students can draw.
- Spoken. The students read their text aloud while the rest of the class draw.

I was struck when looking at the drawings at how easy it was to get a swift and accurate view of a student's ability. Assessment of the drawings is almost instantaneous and whether you are a student or a teacher you can clearly see which elements of the text have been understood irrespective of drawing style or ability. For example, the following is a text and a selection of drawings made by students in a beginner-level class:

In a cafe, on a table, there is a large cactus in a pot decorated with diamonds. At the table sits a man drinking a glass of wine and reading a book about spirals. He is bald but he has a beard and he is wearing mirrored sunglasses, a black vest and shorts. There's a dog sleeping under the table.



Fig.5



Fig.6



Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

Once you are familiar with the text, a quick visual inspection reveals how the students understood the text. Everyone (in this sample of six drawings) understood 'a glass of wine', while only two students drew 'a cactus in a pot' (fig.7 & 8) as in the text. Some students understood 'a beard' while others didn't etc. This enables a quick and easy reference for providing a score, which can be useful in a test, and amusing in class. Once the students see the differences between their drawings and the text it is a good way for them to remember not only vocabulary but also some grammar points such as descriptions of spacial relationships.

I have found that the drawing pictures exercise is seems to be quite an accurate reflection of students' general performance in class. This is becomes clear when the exercise is set as a component of a paper test and the scores for the different sections of the test can be compared. The illustrations, beyond drawing style or ability, are a manifestation of concentration on behalf of the students as they focus on listening (in this case) to an English text.

### About the kind of texts used.

The choice of themes and surrealist twists can make the text more memorable and help students to think about language and its possibilities creatively and also to think about how you can phrase words can change their meaning.

Two friends sitting in a cafe drinking a cup of coffee  
 / Two friends sitting in a cup of coffee eating a cafe.

Adding incongruous elements to text adds difficulty - it may help students to focus on particular

vocabulary or grammar. Also, it is necessary to have some parts of the text which are difficult to realise, otherwise there is no challenge for the students and the exercise becomes less interesting. In experiments, surrealistic imagery elicited greater activation in several brain areas including the parietal cortex, the precuneus which are associated with episodic-memory retrieval (Mohamed M. Mostafa, 2013).

Here is another example of a text accompanied by one of the most complete student drawings (Fig.11):

Please draw a plump, curly-haired man with a moustache wearing a floral-printed shirt, and an elegant, elderly woman wearing a striped dress having a picnic in a forest with an extremely tall man, who is fast asleep, and a school girl with very long hair, six arms and the face of a cat.



Fig.11

The drawing here (fig.11) is an almost perfect representation of the text, but once you are familiar with the text you can easily spot the missing elements... the key words missing are 'plump' and 'moustache'

## Part 2

### Writing Pictures with non-art students

*Does everyone like to draw?*

Clearly, all students, whether they be art students or not are capable of carrying out any of the drawing-based activities listed in this paper, however, I had been hesitant to try the exercises at other universities. In the past, I had asked students whether they liked drawing and usually received a mixed response which left me lacking in confidence as to the benefit of what is intended to be a pleasurable

experience.

Most of the items from the list of objectives and benefits mentioned earlier in regard to art students may also applied to the increasing number of ‘non-art-students’ that I was teaching. The following points are taken from the previous list:

- engaging in something that you enjoy
- When asked if they like drawing, the response is mixed amongst non-art school students. Drawing is nonetheless a pleasurable pastime that most people, even if it’s something they rarely or never do, can enjoy.
- Variety in the classroom.
- Forms of communication.
- to offer the students responsibility and the possibility to use their own initiative in class.
- English language is a requirement of the course rather than a choice.

## Controlled exercises

During the spring semester 2019 I conducted two iterations of the ‘Writing Pictures’ exercise. The students who participated in these two exercises have a comparable ability in English. Although the second year students have the advantage of an extra year’s study and the added confidence which comes with experience, it is somewhat cancelled out by the enthusiasm of the first year students. Both drawings 1 and 2 were completed by 1st and second year students. Below is a description of the conditions, methods used and results a ‘Writing Pictures’ exercise which involved making two drawings. The second of the two drawings was a follow- up to the first and included some of the same elements. The title of this exercise is The Spotty Lizard.

### “The Spotty Lizard”

Two drawings, which I will refer to as ‘drawing-1’ and ‘drawing-2’ were made by around 60 students studying Basic Level English (the 60 students being split into four classes averaging 15 students each). Drawing-1 was made during a regular class, the students were given a sheet of paper and asked to listen carefully and draw all the details of the text that was read aloud to them repeatedly (see text below). For drawing-2, the same students received a follow up text in the form of a paper test. This time, rather than listening, the students could read the text that contained some repeated elements and vocabulary from the first text and some new elements. Both drawings were given a time limit of 15 minutes.

The texts used and the results of the drawings follow:

### Drawing-1.

A listening exercise.

Time taken - approximately 25-30 minutes

(15 minutes drawing, 15 minutes marking)

Number of students - 60

(four classes averaging about 15 students)

The text was read repeatedly while the students drew. The parts of the text for which students could score points are underlined and numbered, there are eight in total. The image below the text was drawn in class to explain and score the text, students swapped and marked each others papers:

In front of the library ①, I saw a young, beautiful woman with wavy hair ② wearing a dress made of leaves ③. She looked serious and was holding a cup of tea in one hand ④ and a spotty lizard in the other ⑤. She was standing on one leg ⑥ on a wooden table ⑦ whilst watching the news on an old TV ⑧.

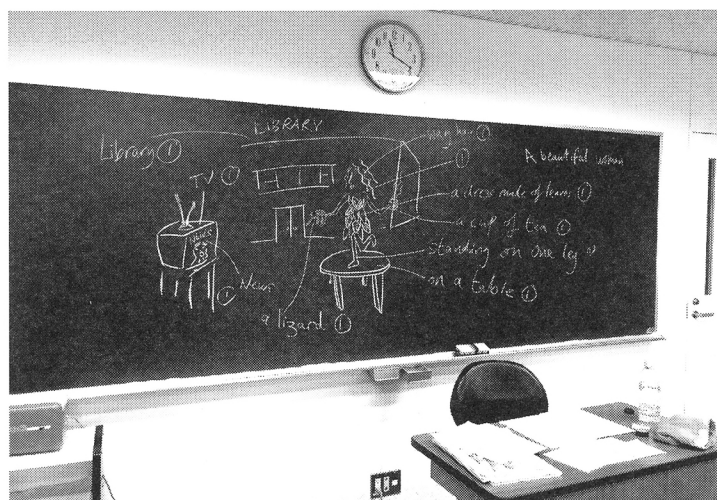


Fig.12 Accompanying image drawn in class

## Drawing-2.

A reading exercise.

Time taken - 15 minutes

Number of students - 69

(the same four classes that made 'drawing-1' but with higher attendance)

The students were given a text to read and from which to make a drawing. The text was designed as a follow-up-text which contained some of the same phrasing and vocabulary used as a listening activity a few weeks earlier. The text was as follows, the parts of the text for which students could score points are underlined and numbered, there are also eight. The 'key' image was projected after the test:

A tall woman in a forest ①. She has wavy hair and a moustache ② and is wearing a dress made of a giant croissant ③. She is holding a cup of tea in one hand ④ and a leaf in the other ⑤. She is standing on one leg ⑥ on a wooden table whilst watching a spotty lizard riding a stripy cat ⑧.



Fig.13 Pre-prepared image



## Sample results for drawing-1

The following pictures show a variety of responses to the first text. This was the first time that the students had tried a drawing exercise in class.

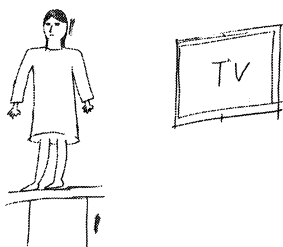


Fig.14

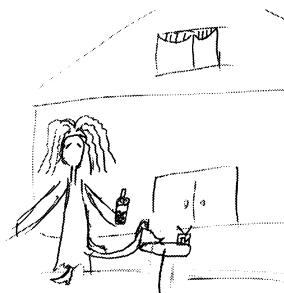


Fig.15

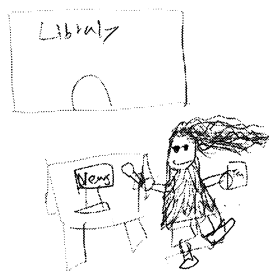


Fig.16

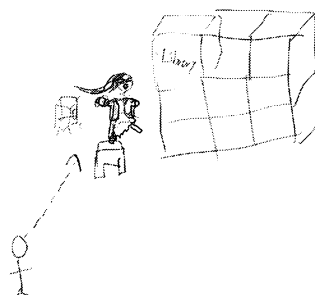


Fig.17

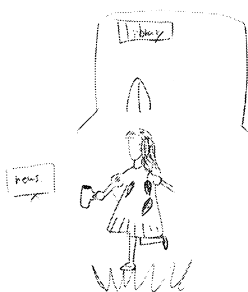


Fig.18

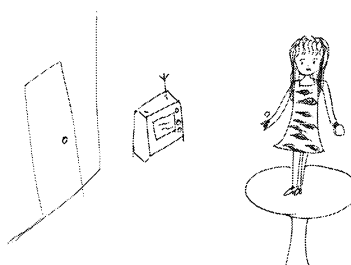


Fig.19

In front of the library, I saw a young, beautiful woman with wavy hair wearing a dress made of leaves. She looked serious and was holding a cup of tea in one hand and a spotty lizard in the other. She was standing on one leg on a wooden table whilst watching the news on an old TV.

## Sample results for drawing-2

The following pictures show a variety of responses to the second text.

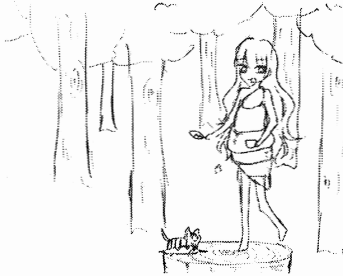


Fig.20

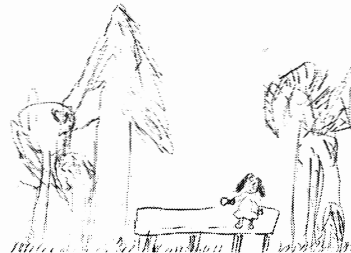


Fig.21



Fig.22

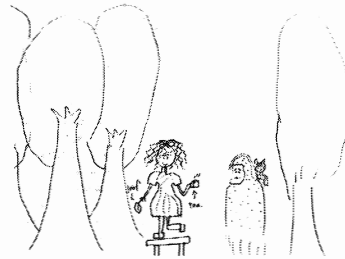


Fig.23

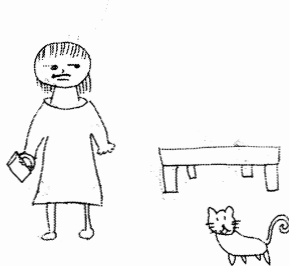


Fig.24

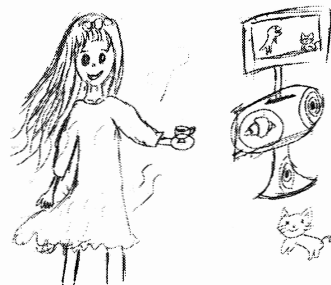


Fig.25

A tall woman in a forest. She has wavy hair and a moustache and is wearing a dress made of a giant croissant. She is holding a cup of tea in one hand and a leaf in the other. She is standing on one leg on a wooden table whilst watching a spotty lizard riding a stripy cat.

## Results

Of course, we can mark the drawings based on the texts and see how the students performed, charts below which show the statistical data, but before that there is some evidence that can be understood from the drawings.

Given my initial reticence, as to whether the Writing Pictures exercise would be beneficial for non-art students, I was happy with the level of student engagement in the project. Moreover, I would say that the drawings show that the students enjoyed the challenge of drawing. Even in the drawings made by students who may not be used to drawing on a regular basis, or those who would say that they don't like to draw, you can see evidence of the focus needed to complete the task.

The drawings show that some of the students are more practiced in drawing than others, however, the level of drawing ability does not seem to strongly affect the students' ability to take part in the exercise. Figures 16 and 18, for example, show different drawing styles but both pictures display a similar level of understanding of the text. The two tables which follow show the way that the drawings were marked, the points awarded to the students and the results as a percentage.

Drawing-1 results. A text was read aloud to the students in class.

Phrase	Number of correct answers out of 60 students	Result as a percentage
① In front of the library...	38	63%
② Wavy hair	45	75%
③ Wearing a dress made of leaves	15	25%
④ Holding a cup of tea in one hand	49	82%
⑤ And a spotty lizard in the other	0 (hence the title for this exercise!)	0%
⑥ Standing on one leg	28	47%
⑦ On a wooden table	16	27%
⑧ News on an old TV	54	90%
<b>Average results</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>51%</b>

Drawing-2 results. A printed text was provided.

Phrase	Includes new, reused or variations of words and phrases used in 'Drawing-1'	Number of correct answers out of 69 students	%
① A tall woman in a forest	New vocabulary or phrase	56	81%
② <sup>a</sup> Wavy hair	Repeated from drawing-1	64	93%
② <sup>b</sup> A moustache	New vocabulary or phrase	4.5	7%
③ A dress made of a giant croissant	Repeat with variation 1	5	25%
④ Holding a cup of tea in one hand	Repeated from drawing-1	69	100%
⑤ A leaf	Repeat with variation	51	74%
⑥ Standing on one leg	Repeated from drawing-1	48	70%
⑦ A spotty lizard	Repeated from drawing-1	24	35%
⑧ A stripy cat	New vocabulary or phrase	65	94%
⑦ / ⑧ Lizard riding a cat / cat riding a lizard	New vocabulary or phrase	15	22%
<b>Average results</b>		<b>44</b>	<b>64%</b>

The percentage score for drawing-1 was 51% and for drawing-2 64%, so there is a general improvement. The results are shown as percentages because the attendance for the second drawing was slightly higher, there being 60 students in attendance for drawing-1 and 69 for drawing-2.

Drawing-1 was the first time the students had drawn in class, so there was some uncertainty and hesitation and you would expect the students to perform better on their second try. There were 9 extra students participating in drawing-2 who were attempting the task for the first time (those absent for drawing-1).

Reading a text may be easier than listening to spoken word, this may contribute to the better scoring in drawing 2.

The following chart shows a comparison of repeated phrases in drawings 1 & 2:

Comparison chart A - Repeated and variations of words or phrases in Drawings 1 & 2

Phrase	Includes new, reused or variations of words or phrases used in 'Drawing-1'	Drawing-1	Drawing-2
Wavy hair	Repeated from drawing-1	93%	93%
A dress made of a giant croissant / A dress made of leaves	Repeat with variation	25%	25%
Holding a cup of tea in one hand	Repeated from drawing-1	82%	100%
A leaf / leaves	Repeat with variation	25%	74%
Standing on one leg	Repeated from drawing-1	47%	70%
A spotty lizard	Repeated from drawing-1	0%	35%
<b>Average results</b>		<b>45%</b>	<b>66%</b>

Some of the phrases which are repeated in drawing-2 are only partially repeated, meaning that they contain something which could have been learned in drawing-1 but also some new element. These are listed as either 'repeated from drawing-1' or 'repeat with variation'.

You will see, for example, that in drawing-1, 25% of the students understood the meaning of "wearing a dress made of leaves" and in drawing-2 there were 25% who understood "wearing a dress made of a giant croissant".

It is difficult to establish which part of the phrase the students did, or didn't understand as there is a combination of a previously used phrase with new vocabulary. Therefore, I have included a table to show only the results that are directly comparable below:

Comparison chart B - repeated words or phrases in Drawing-1 &amp; Drawing-2

Phrase	Includes new, reused or variations of words and phrases used in 'Drawing-1'	Drawing-1	Drawing-2
Wavy hair	Repeated from drawing-1	93%	93%
Holding a cup of tea in one hand	Repeated from drawing-1	82%	100%
Standing on one leg	Repeated from drawing-1	47%	70%
A spotty lizard	Repeated from drawing-1	0%	35%
<b>Average results</b>		<b>55%</b>	<b>74%</b>

## Discussion

This report represents the first analysis of the Writing Pictures project, so there are still many ways that it could be developed, and questions to be answered. Moving forward, there may be some value in designing into a syllabus a series of texts so that students' development can be better assessed. A series of texts could be written which explore vocabulary themes and grammar variations in a way that progresses throughout a course.

The Writing Pictures texts can be used in different ways. Reading and listening exercises work well with basic to intermediate level classes while more advanced students, after being introduced to the listening exercise, are able to write, read and exchange their own texts.

Generally, class size and drawing ability has not been a problem so far. For advanced students, there may be a point at which the complexity of a text necessary to challenge the students may become difficult for some students to draw. Although the students' ability to draw is not of critical importance in this exercise, there is a demand on the teacher to be able to accurately depict a text either as a pre-prepared drawing (this can reduce the time taken in class to complete the exercise) or as a step by step drawing made in class.

Communication through drawing is a valuable skill, it is pleasing to see the transformation between

drawings 1 & 2 in the controlled tests. Students can be empowered by seeing that they can use both language and drawing as forms of communication.

Assessing the drawings is a straightforward process for both students and teachers. The texts should be about a paragraph long and contain around 10 key points to be drawn. Most students will include half or more of the points in their drawings, so marking is a matter for scanning for three to five of the more difficult points. There is usually one really difficult point that most of the students will miss.

When developing further texts I would like to consider what types of language can or should be focused on without forgetting that the value of the exercise also lies in the fact that it is a non-textbook exercise and should offer something other than functional textbook imagery. It would however be interesting to explore the way that grammar structures can be used in the texts further.

In conclusion, given the results seen in the tables and the positive reception of the project in classes Writing Pictures seems to help students to learn English and is worth integrating into ESL classes. It achieves the goal of introducing variety into classes while still containing a strong language-learning content.

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